

6-15-1981

She and Tolkien

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Recommended Citation

Rateliff, John D. (1981) "*She* and Tolkien," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 8 : No. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol8/iss2/3>

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Abstract

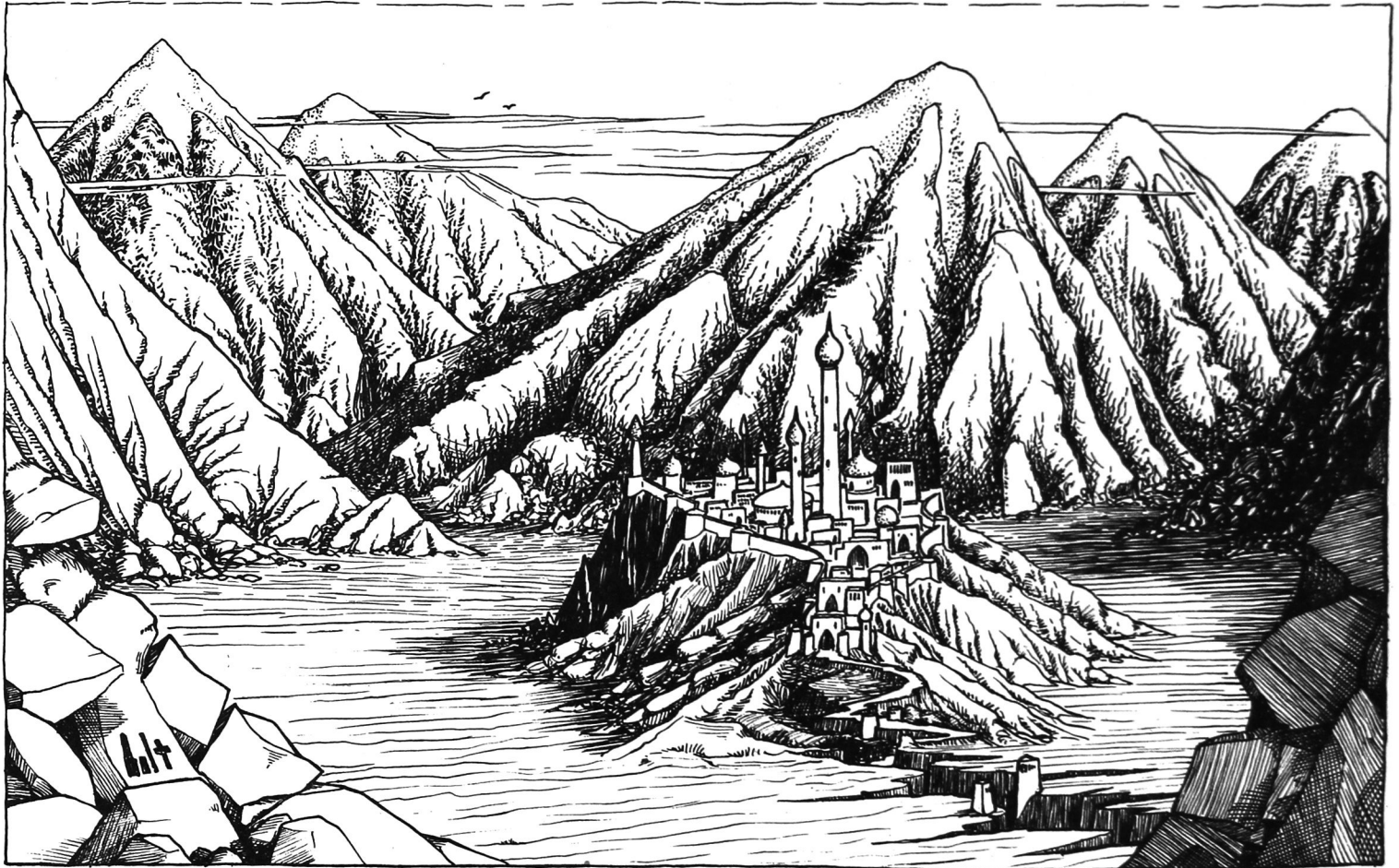
Notes that Tolkien only admitted one post-medieval source as an influence—Haggard’s *She* series—and traces borrowings and influences of the series on Tolkien, particularly parallels between the characters of Ayesha and Galadriel and between the cities of Kor and Gondolin.

Additional Keywords

Haggard, H. Rider—Characters—Ayesha; Haggard, H. Rider. *She*—Influence on Tolkien; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Galadriel; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Sources; George Bolt

SHE AND TOLKIEN

JOHN D. RATELIFF



In Lin Carter's *Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings"*, there was a statement that the only modern book J. R. R. Tolkien would admit had influenced him in his own works was H. Rider Haggard's *She*.¹ This is a rather remarkable statement, since over the years various Tolkien critics have put forward one work after another as one of Tolkien's sources, only to have Tolkien steadfastly deny any post-medieval source.² After having pointedly denied being influenced by C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald, and Charles Williams (among others), it is interesting that he would volunteer the information that Haggard influenced his writing.³ Also interesting is the fact that, while this is the only admission of influence I know of that Tolkien made in his later years, I have never come across a single article which investigated the Haggard/Tolkien connection, although whole books have been written about other possible sources for his work.⁴ In this paper, I would like to try to fill that gap by examining the parallels between the *She* series -- *She* (1887), *Ayesha: The Return of She* (1905), *She and Allan* (1921), and *Wisdom's Daughter* (1923)⁵ -- and Tolkien's Middle-Earth works to see if Haggard really did influence Tolkien and, if so, in what ways.

The most obvious parallel is *She* herself -- Ayesha, *Wisdom's Daughter*, *She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed*. An exceedingly beautiful woman, so beautiful that all who see her remember the sight ever after, *She* rules over a small, isolated, ancient kingdom, the borders of which no one is allowed to pass. Strangers are permitted entrance only if she has sent word beforehand to admit them, and even then they must make part of the journey blindfolded. Beautiful and terrible, worshipful but fearsome, she is not only wise and beautiful but also immortal. There is a character in *The Lord of the*

Rings who fits the above description down to the last detail -- Galadriel. Like *She*, Galadriel is immortal, wise, queenly, and beautiful beyond belief. There are important differences between Ayesha and Galadriel, but the similarities are striking. They even share one of the same faults -- too much pride and a desire to rule over the whole world. There is even one minute when both almost reveal themselves as they really are or as they might become:

"*She* (Ayesha) began slowly to stroke her abundant hair, then her breast and body. Wherever her fingers passed the mystic light was born, until in that darkened room -- for the dusk was gathering -- she shimmered from head to foot like the water of a phosphorescent sea, a being glorious yet fearful to behold. Then she waved her hand, and, save for the gentle radiance on her brow, became as she had been." (*Ayesha*, p. 272)

"*She* (Galadriel) lifted up her hand and from the ring that she wore there issued a great light that illumined her alone and left all else dark. She stood before Frodo seeming now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful. Then she let her hand fall, and the light faded, and suddenly she laughed again, and lo! she was shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white, whose gentle voice was soft and sad." (*LotR* Bk II p. 381).⁶ (Compare also the descriptions of Gandalf (*LotR* Bk I p. 40) and Glorfindel (*LotR* Bk II p. 235).)

Finally, there is the Mirror of Galadriel. In *The Lord of*

the Rings, this is described as "a low pedestal carved like a branching tree" upon which stands "a basin of silver, wide and shallow" filled with clear water (LotR Bk II p. 376). In She (p. 155), we are told of "a vessel like a font cut in carved stone...full of pure water" (described in She and Allan (p. 274) as "a marble tripod on which stood a basin half full of water"). Both Galadriel and Ayesha use this "mirror" to show the heroes visions of distant places and use it themselves to see what is happening in the outer world. But although they are described in very similar terms, the two mirrors are not identical, and differ in several important aspects. Ayesha says of hers "...It is no magic.... There is no such thing as magic, though there is such a thing as a knowledge of the secrets of Nature. This water is my glass; in it I see what passes if I will to summon up the pictures, which is not often. Therein I can show thee what thou wilt of the past, if it be anything that has to do with this country and with what I have known, or anything that thou, the gazer, hast known. Think of a face if thou wilt, and it shall be reflected from thy mind upon the water. I know not all the secret yet -- I can read nothing in the future. But it is an old secret; I did not find it." (She, p. 161). Galadriel says "Many things I can command the Mirror to reveal, and to some I can show what they desire to see. But the Mirror will also show things unbidden, and those are often stranger and more profitable than things which we wish to behold. What you will see, if you leave the Mirror free to work, I cannot tell. For it shows things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be. But which it is that he sees, even the wisest cannot always tell. Do you wish to look?" (LotR Bk II p. 377). She also adds "This is what your folk would call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean..."). I think the fact that Tolkien gave Galadriel her Mirror when a crystal ball, one of the palantiri, would have done just as well, argues for a deliberate borrowing on his part.

Besides the striking similarities between She and Galadriel, there are many other possible borrowings from Haggard in The Lord of the Rings. For example, both Haggard and Tolkien claimed that they were only editing tales written by the characters themselves (see Haggard's introduction to She and Tolkien's Prologue to The Lord of the Rings), their heroes cross swamps filled with "corpse candles" (She, p. 129, LotR Bk IV, Ch. 2) and have a fondness for tobacco, their pipes causing great astonishment among the peoples they meet (She, p. 97-98, LotR Bk III, p. 162-168). Both She (p. 215-216) and LotR (Bk V, Ch. 2 and Ch. 9) contain descriptions of the March of the Dead, and the description of She's sudden aging and death (She, p. 296-299) is very similar to the sudden aging of Saruman's body after he is killed by Grima Wormtongue (LotR Bk VI p. 300). There is also an echo of the One Ring in She and Allan when Allan Quatermain is given a magic amulet which he is warned to keep safe. He wears it on a chain around his neck and keeps it hidden under his shirt, only bringing it out on rare occasions or at great need. Soon after he receives it, a magician tells him he will not be able to throw it away even if he wanted to and challenges him to try.

"I did try, but something seemed to prevent me from accomplishing my purpose of giving the carving back to Zikali as I wished to do. First my pipe got in the way of my hand, then the elephant hairs caught in the collar of my coat; then a pang of rheumatism to which I was accustomed from an old injury, developed of a sudden in my left arm, and lastly I grew tired of bothering about the thing. "Zikali, who had been watching my movements, burst out into one of his terrible laughs...." (She and Allan, p. 11).

"Frodo drew the Ring out of his pocket again and looked at it. It now appeared plain and smooth, without mark or device that he could see. The gold looked very fair and pure, and Frodo thought how rich and beautiful was its colour, how perfect was its roundness. It was an admirable thing and altogether precious. When he took it out he had intended to fling it from him into the very hottest part of the fire. But he found now that he could not do so, not without a great struggle. He weighed the Ring in his hand, hesi-

tating, and forcing himself to remember all that Gandalf had told him; and then with an effort of will he made a movement, as if to cast it away -- but he found that he had put it back in his pocket. "Gandalf laughed grimly." (LotR Bk I, p. 70).

It is the setting of She, the ruined city of Kor, which presents what I think is the clearest case of Haggard's influence on Tolkien. This city stands in the center of a green plain which is completely surrounded by circular mountains. The plain and mountains are in fact the remains of an enormous volcano whose crater once contained a great lake. The way to reach the ruined city is to go through a long tunnel which has a stream flowing through it. In addition, there is a secret, hidden path over the surrounding mountains which the heroes use as an escape route at the end of the book (She, p. 135-140; p. 315-316). This description of Kor would also be an excellent description of the hidden vale of Tumladen and the city of Gondolin, which in The Silmarillion⁷ is built on a low hill in the center of a green plain (once a great lake), surrounded by the Encircling Mountains. Gondolin can only be reached by "a deep way under the mountains delved in the darkness of the world by waters that flowed out to join the streams of Sirion." (Silm. p. 125). When Gondolin is finally attacked and destroyed, the survivors of the battle escape by a secret path over the mountains (Silm. p. 242-43).⁸

Besides the obvious similarities between the descriptions of Kor and Gondolin, Kor and its people are also strongly reminiscent of Tolkien's Numenoreans, whose history is briefly recounted in "Akallabeth" (Silm. p. 259-282) and in Appendix A of The Lord of the Rings. Like the people of Kor, the Numenoreans ruled the world and, like them, they were obsessed with tombs and death. She describes the mountains surrounding Kor as being almost completely hollowed out to serve as tombs. Like the people of Kor, the Numenoreans and their descendants possessed the secret of preserving bodies for ages in perfect condition (unlike the Egyptians, who were forced to disembowel their mummies).⁹ Both the Numenoreans and the people of Kor turned to evil in the end, after some three thousand years of glorious civilization, and cults of human sacrifice arose in both lands. As a result, in Kor "Heaven smote the people with a mighty pestilence, so that they perished and perished till few were left. Thus Kor fell by the sword of God..." (Wisdom's Daughter, p. 220). Numenor, or Atlantis, was also destroyed by God as a result of its evil, suddenly cast down into the sea (Silm. p. 278-281). In both Haggard and Tolkien, though, a few escaped the disaster: some evil and some good. According to Haggard, some of those who fled Kor to escape the plague were the ancestors of the ancient Egyptians. In Tolkien's myth, the Numenoreans who escaped the drowning of their homeland founded a North Kingdom and a South Kingdom, Arnor and Gondor, which make a nice parallel to the two kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. Tolkien once wrote of their descendants "The Numenoreans of Gondor were proud, peculiar, and archaic, and I think they are best pictured in (say) Egyptian terms. In many ways they resembled "Egyptians" -- the love of, and power to construct, the gigantic and massive. And in their great interest in ancestry and in tombs."¹⁰

Haggard also may have provided Tolkien with part of the inspiration for one of the stories that meant the most to him: the legend of Beren and Luthien. The love of an immortal for a mortal occurs again and again throughout Ayesha and Wisdom's Daughter, along with the consequences thereof. Referring to the Biblical passage about how "the sons of Heaven came down to the daughters of men, and found that they were fair," the re-incarnated Ayesha says of herself "Might it not have chanced that once a daughter of Heaven came down to a man of Earth and loved him well?" (Ayesha, p. 272-273). This is exactly what happened in The Silmarillion when Luthien's mother, a Maia (angel), wed her father, a king of elves (Silm. p. 55-56). Their child, Luthien, was royal, divine, immortal, and the "most beautiful of all living things" (Silm. p. 183). She was far above any mortal man but, like Ayesha, she fell in love with the man who loved her, and when he died, she died as well, preferring to join him in death than to live without him (Silm. p. 186). Ayesha says to her love, "Come what may, never, never more shall we be separate who are ordained one. Whilst thou livest I live at thy side, and when thou diest, if die thy

must, I'll follow thee through worlds and firmaments, nor shall all the doors of heaven or hell avail against my love. Where thou goest, thither I will go." (*Ayesha*, p. 345). And when he does die, Ayesha sends a message to him, saying "...await me in the Gate of Death where it is granted that I greet thee presently." (*Ayesha*, p. 349). Compare this with Luthien's words to the dying Beren -- "(She) kissed him, bidding him await her beyond the Western Sea..." (*Silm.*, p. 186). These parallel loves of Ayesha and Luthien Tinuviel may possibly be the most fundamental and deepest influences Haggard -- or anyone else -- ever had on Tolkien's works.

By pointing out all of these parallels, I hope I have shown why I think *She* and its sequels are definitely among Tolkien's sources for *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*. It should be pointed out, however, that Tolkien adapted everything he took from his sources until it became a part of his own story. Ayesha may have inspired Galadriel, but Galadriel is not *She*. Gondolin may have been suggested by Kor, but they are not the same city. If Tolkien fans owe any debt to Haggard, it is that his books were a major source among the many from which Tolkien drew inspiration for his masterpiece.

NOTES

¹ Lin Carter, *Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings"* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), p. 20. Carter's statement is undoubtedly based on "An Interview with Tolkien" by Henry Resnik in *Niekas* #18 (Spring, 1967), p. 37-43, in which Tolkien said "I suppose as a boy *She* interested me as much as anything..." (This interview was drawn to my attention by Mr. Charles Noad, bibliographer for the Tolkien Society.)

² He did admit to the influence of such works as *Beowulf* and *The Elder Edda*.

³ For his denials, see Carter, p. 18-20; Clyde S. Kilby, *Tolkien & The Silmarillion* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1976), p. 30-31, 73, 76-77; Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and their friends* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), p. 121; and the interview by Mr. Resnik.

⁴ Among them Carter's book, Ruth S. Noel's *The Mythology of Middle-Earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), and many short articles. Carpenter (p. 158) does mention Haggard as being among authors who "made their mark" on Tolkien.

⁵ All references to Haggard's works are from the following editions: *She: A History of Adventures* (1887; rpt. London: Collins, 1957), *Ayesha: The Return of She* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1905), *She and Allan* (1921; rpt. New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), and *Wisdom's Daughter: The Life and Love Story of She-Who-Must-Be-Obed* (1923; rpt. New York: Ballantine Books, 1978).

⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Rev. Ed. 1965).

⁷ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, edited by Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

⁸ See Tolkien's own drawing of "Gondolin and Vale of Tumladen", Plate 35 in *Pictures by J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

⁹ I am indebted to Dr. Rhona Beare of the University of Newcastle, New South Wales, for bringing this to my attention. Dr. Beare also pointed out to me the occurrence of the name "Kor" in the excerpt from "The Lay of Earendel" (c1915) printed on p. 77 of Carpenter's *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: H. Mifflin, 1977), and the fact that Haggard's novel *Allan Quatermain* was probably the source for the Mouth of Sauron, the *flet* (*talán*) of Lothlorien, and the description of Sauron's temple on Numenor.

¹⁰ J. R. R. Tolkien to Rhona Beare, unpublished letter of 14 October 1958. c1981, Estate of J. R. R. Tolkien, reprinted courtesy of the Executors and Dr. Beare.

NO SUN OVER NARNIA

"There is no God," the foolish say.
"There is no sun; there is no day."
Away, away.
I've seen the spider spin a web,
A shining silver wheel of light,
Of gossamer where dewdrops bright
Hang still beside the way.

"God is dead," the foolish cry.
"The desert blooms; the sea is dry."
Deny, deny.
I've heard the skylark praise the sun
In soaring ecstasy of song,
In trembling crucifixion hung
Upon the summer sky.

"We are bereft," the foolish weep.
"The mountain stoops; the plain is steep."
Such council keep.
I've tasted of the autumn's fruit
And drunk the blood of the dying vine
And with this sacrificial wine
Have bought the balm of sleep.

"All ends in night," the foolish know.
"Light is dark and to is fro."
It is not so.
I've felt the purifying touch
Of lonely winter's bitter wind
When rime the shivering waters rimmed
And kissed the silent snow.

"We are alone, nor woe nor bliss,"
The foolish know, but I know this:
The truth they miss.
I've smelled the fragrance of the rose
Whose fainting flower in rapture sings
When spring to all the woodland brings
The breath of Artemis.

Mark Allaby



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MYTHLORE seeks new contributions of articles, other written material, and art. With more material to draw from, we can provide a greater variety and balance in each issue. We seek material on all aspects of Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams, and would especially like to see articles on *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales* (both on them alone and in light of *The Lord of the Rings*), since there has not been much written on these works. We also welcome articles on the genres of myth and fantasy.

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